DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 056 EC 300 050

AUTHOR Ruz, Magdalena
TITLE To Refer or Not To Refer...What Are the Questions? Evaluative Questions for Procedural Implementation of an Effective Prereferral Phase for Culturally Diverse and Limited English Proficient Students.
PUB DATE Oct 90
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Council for Exceptional Children Symposium on Culturally Diverse Exceptional Children (Albuquerque, NM, October 18-20, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Background; *Cultural Differences; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation Methods; *Language Handicaps; Limited English Speaking; *Referral; Student Evaluation; Test Bias
IDENTIFIERS *Prereferral Intervention

ABSTRACT

Culturally specific behaviors must be considered in the pre-referral phase of assessing culturally diverse/limited-English-proficient students. Inferences regarding the reasons for students' performance reflect the knowledge base acquired by the school staff concerning a student's culture. Evaluative questions can gather data to assure non-biased assessment of culturally diverse/limited-English-proficient students. Such an evaluation involves: language proficiency/dominance information; review of records; observation; interviews with parent, teacher, and student; work samples; testing; and analytic teaching. (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED329056

To Refer or Not to Refer...What are the Questions?

Evaluative Questions for Procedural Implementation of An Effective Prereferral Phase For Culturally Diverse and Limited English Proficient Students

a paper and workshop at CEC Symposium on Culturally Diverse Exceptional Children, Albuquerque, NM, 10/20/90

by Magdalena Ruz

What are the questions? Diagnosticians, teachers, principals, etc., routinely question referrals of students for special education considerations. The normal questioning prevails-vision , hearing, grades, etc. and the subsequent screenings suffice to answer them. However, it has been suggested that culturally specific behaviors must be considered in the prereferral phase of culturally diverse/limited English proficient students (Chamberlain and Medinos-Landurand;1991, Metz;1988).

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Magdalena Ruz
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The crucial questions, regarding the culture of the referred student, never arise. At best, the question might arise as to what the home language is and how long had the student been in the United States. There are no instruments nor checklists to accurately gauge the acculturation of the student and his school performance. Chamberlain and Medinos-Landurand offer a continuum scale with descriptors of cultural elements which are very helpful . This is a beginning, however, what are the questions?

Inferences regarding the reasons for students performance in school and during the assessment process can only reflect the cultural knowledge base acquired by the school staff of that student's particular culture. And the tests administered, informal (teacher-made, end of chapter, etc.) and formal (standardized), also reflect this bias. Bilingual personnel are often times enlisted to conduct interventions and administer test instruments. Even when linguistic factors are taken into consideration, such as using bilingual personnel or translating tests, in an effort to provide a non-biased assessment, superficial data is suspect if cultural factors are not incorporated into the prereferral intervention strategies. In fact, the relationship between culture and language is inseparable (Evans and Guevara;1974).

EC 302057

Using Collier's model, Prereferral Intervention for Minority Students,(1988) special education personnel are afforded a framework to begin the investigation. And that is what it is. When a student is experiencing academic difficulties, school personnel must exhaust all possible

causes before the finger is pointed at the child. To often we attribute the deficit to be within the child instead of the system itself (Sugai,1989). This norm-referenced approach to assessment also assumes that data collected using non-curriculum based measures can be used to make determinations on placement decisions. And the referral-to-placement process typically is initiated by teachers, based on subjective judgement and made for reasons that have little to do with classroom functioning (Algozzine, Ysseldyke and Christenson, 1983).

Brophy and Good (1986) , in describing a functional approach to assessment, indicate that one needs to assume that learning is an interactive process influenced by the learner's characteristics and instructional variables. Furthermore, as quantity and quality of classroom instruction improves, student performance will be enhanced (Hilliard, 1980). Based on these assumptions, diagnosticians must conduct a in-depth investigation keeping in mind the student's cultural background.

What is offered here are evaluative questions for gathering data prior to the collaboration of staff to assure non-bias of culturally diverse/limited English proficient students.

1. Language proficiency/dominance information

What is the student's proficiency level in English?
Does the test that measured this only address basic interpersonal communication skills?
Does it measure academic language of reading and writing?
What is the student's proficiency level in the native language?
Was this information obtained from a translated publisher test or was a native language translator used?
Are the items on this test culturally bound?
(For example, does the student recognize the statue of liberty and its symbolism of liberty, democracy, freedom?)
What is the dominant language?
What test instrument determined this?
What vocabulary domains is the student proficient in? (For example, home vocabulary-food,furniture,utensils, etc.)
Within those domains, what language does the student prefer?
What types of codeswitching does the student use?
Is the student an effective codeswitcher?
Has the developmental age of the student been considered in the administration and interpretation of the test results?
Has language loss been considered?
Is this student an infant bilingual (having learned both languages simultaneously)?

Has the student's socioeconomic background been considered in the interpretation of the results?
What language samples and observations substantiate the findings gathered from standardized language tests?
Is there personnel on the decision-making team that is a native speaker of this student's native language, and has knowledge of dialectical differences?

2. Review of Records

What was the last grade this student completed in the native country?
How many years, months has this student received instruction in American schools?
Did this student at any time "skip" grades?
What was the composition of the students in the classroom?
Has the student received ESOL and/or bilingual instruction?
How much daily instruction addressed linguistic needs?
Has this student ever been retained?
What have been prior attempts to assist him?

3.Observation

Have several observations taken place in different settings?
Is the observer impartial?
Does the observer have a strong understanding of this student's cultural background?
Could the problems exhibited be attributed to the cultural background?
Could the problems exhibited be attributed to acculturation factors (ie. culture shock, marginality)?
Could the problem be staff's lack of knowledge on first and second language acquisition principles and classroom implications ?

4.Interviews

a. **Parent**
Are parents aware of the presenting problems?
Has a native speaker interpreter conducted a parent interview?
Are the parents knowledgeable about the American educational system?

b. **Teacher**
What are the concerns of the referring teacher?
What other teachers instruct this student?
Do they also have the same concerns?
Does the referring teacher know the cultural background of this student?

c. **Student**

Does the student exhibit the motivation to learn?
Does the student display any emotional problems which could be influencing his performance?
How acculturated is the student?
Was the interview conducted by bilingual staff?
If the interview was not conducted by bilingual staff, could the student's responses have been influenced by his perception of receptivity of monolingual/ monocultural personnel?
If the interview was not conducted by bilingual staff, could the interviewer's interpretation of the interview be influenced by his lack of this student's cultural background?

5.Work Samples

Are samples of work comprehensive?
Are the same problems exhibited repeatedly?
Could the task demand be beyond the student's English language capabilities?
Is the reading task at his frustrational level?
Does he have the experiential background to understand the concepts presented?
Did the student understand the directions preceding the assignment?
How were the directions presented?

6.Testing

Is test data bias against the student in terms of his cultural cognitive style (ie. time on task, preference over rote learning)?

7. Analytic Teaching

Is the teaching style of the teacher familiar to the student?
Has the teacher considered reteaching the concept using another modality?
Does the teacher understand the relationship between second language acquisition and learning to read in English?

Assessement bias will be inherent in approaches that do not take into consideration the potential cultural differences that culturally diverse students bring to school with them. Diagnosticians must consider the observed behaviors from the viewpoint that it is not a deficit but a difference and that the child is innocent until proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that he is handicapped. What are the questions that will prevent a misdiagnosis?

REFERENCES

Algozzine, B., Ysseldyke, J.E. and Christenson, S. (1983) An analysis of the incidence of special class placement : The masses are burgeoning. *Journal of Special Education*, 17, 141-147.

Brophy and Good, (1986) "Teacher behavior and student achievement," in M.S. Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of Research on Teaching (pp. 328-3775), New York: Macmillan.

Chamberlain, P. and Medinos-Landurand, P., (1991) "Practical considerations for the assessment of LEP students with special needs," in E. Hamayan and J.S. Damico (Eds) Limiting Bias in the Assessment of Bilingual Students. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

Collier, C. (1988) Assessing Minority Students with Learning and Behavior. Lindale, TX: Hamilton Pub.

Hilliard, A.G. (1980) Cultural Diversity and special education. *Exceptional Children*, 46, 584-588.

Evans, J. and Guevara, A.E. (1974) Classroom instruction for young Spanish speakers, *Exceptional Children*, 41 p.17.

Metz, I.B. (1988) The relative importance of language and culture in making decisions about hispanic students referred to special education. *NABE Journal*, v.12,3,191-218.

Sugai, G. (1989). Best assessment practices for students with behavioral disorders: Accommodation to cultural diversity and individual differences.*Behavioral Disorders*, 144:4, 263-278.